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Residents deserve drinkable water

By [Letters to the editor](#) on February 12, 2016 at 3:31 AM

Albany Times-Union

Clean, drinkable water is a basic human necessity. It is fundamental to the environment that sustains all human activity. Even so, for much of our history, we have taken fresh, life-sustaining water for granted. Here, adjacent to the vast St. Lawrence River watershed, blessed as it is with an abundance of clean water, threats to it have frequently seemed remote. In the unfolding story of Flint, Mich., and, closer to home, Hoosick Falls, we are witnessing the toll on a community when access to fresh water is compromised and government turns its back or is slow to mobilize. Much like what has happened with salt contamination that has made drinking water unsafe in the Town of Orleans.

While the number of affected residents and businesses is small compared to Flint or even Hoosick Falls, it is clear that salt from a source other than the individual homeowners is in the groundwater. And it is there in high enough concentrations to cause serious health concerns – the introduction of lead from salt-caused corrosion foremost among them.

And while corroded pipes and appliances are not within the mission of Save The River, protection of the River, its tributaries and the people that live within its watershed from polluted water, very much are. As Riverkeeper, we join our community in the effort to protect it.

A state that can contemplate \$100 billion in multi-year capital projects should be able to put together a funding package for the town that gets clean, safe and affordable drinking water to its citizens. And it is imperative that it do so as soon as possible.

DEC presses Honeywell, Saint-Gobain to clean up Hoosick Falls water pollution

Saint-Gobain, Honeywell cite cooperation with officials in Hoosick Falls water crisis

By Brendan J. Lyons

Albany Times-Union

Published 9:59 pm, Thursday, February 11, 2016

The state [Department of Environmental Conservation](#) on Thursday called on two corporations, [Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics](#) and Honeywell International, to enter consent orders that would require them to clean up the remnants of a toxic chemical that polluted water supplies in and around the village of Hoosick Falls.

The DEC said in a statement that their preliminary investigation that began last month determined the two corporations, and possibly others, are the "parties responsible" for the presence of high levels of perfluorooctanoic acid that were discovered two years ago in the village's public water supply. The chemical has since been found in private wells in and around the village, as well as in the groundwater under Saint-Gobain's McCaffrey Street plant a few hundred yards from the village's water treatment plant.

Saint-Gobain has owned the McCaffrey Street plant since 1999. Honeywell's predecessor corporation, Allied Signal, operated the facility from 1986 to 1996, one of five companies that owned and operated the site since 1956.

Dina Silver Pokedoff, a spokeswoman for Saint-Gobain, noted that DEC's letter to the companies said they were "potentially" responsible and that there has been no official determination about the cause of the contamination, which state officials acknowledged may have come from multiple manufacturing facilities in and around the village.

"As we've done from the first time we were notified about PFOA in Hoosick Falls in December 2014, we will continue to cooperate with all parties involved," Silver Pokedoff said. "This letter does not alter Saint-Gobain's desire to work cooperatively with all parties in identifying and implementing solutions to resolve this matter including our voluntarily funding the distribution of bottled water, funding the installation of a temporary water filtration system, which should be online next week and funding a long-term water filtration system expected to be in place by October."

[Victoria A. Streitfeld](#), a spokeswoman for Honeywell, said company officials met with state officials Monday to develop a plan for the company to help secure alternate sources of water for people with private wells affected by the pollution.

"Honeywell is doing a review to understand the historic operations by our predecessor, Allied Signal Laminated Systems

Inc.," she said. Streitfeld added that the company's initial review indicated that after selling the Hoosick Falls operation in 1996, Allied Signal "conducted several site investigations and received 'No Further Action' letters from the New York state Department of Environmental Conservation. Regulations did not require testing for PFOA at the time."

DEC said the agency will use its Superfund authority to make sure the contamination is cleaned up.

"We will hold all companies responsible for groundwater contamination and make sure they pay all costs associated with the investigation and remediation of the source of the problem as well as assuring a usable drinking water source," DEC's acting commissioner, Basil Seggos, said in a statement.

The DEC also released a map identifying 11 current and former manufacturing sites in Hoosick Falls where it said PFOA chemicals may have been used in processing. The sites are: John Street; McCaffrey Street; Carey Avenue; Church Street; three locations on River Road; Liberty Street; First Street, and two locations on Mechanic Street.

The state decision to formally hold the two corporations responsible for cleaning up the pollution came as the state Assembly announced it will conduct hearings in April on statewide water quality issues in the wake of the Hoosick Falls crisis. The announcement followed comments made Tuesday by state Senate Majority Leader [John Flanagan](#) that he's open to hearings, but after issues with the water have been resolved.

Republican Assemblyman [Steve McLaughlin](#) of Rensselaer County, who had previously written a letter calling for a hearing on Hoosick Falls, lauded the step.

"The people of Hoosick Falls deserve clean water, but they also deserve the truth," he said. "These hearings will shed light on who knew what, and when they knew it."

NY to Require Manufacturers to Pay for Fouled Water Cleanup

By Mary Esch, Associated press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Feb 11, 2016, 10:13 PM ET

Two industrial companies will be held liable for the cleanup of a toxic chemical that found its way into an upstate New York village's drinking water, the acting state environmental commissioner said Thursday.

The Department of Environmental Conservation sent a letter to New Jersey-based [Honeywell International](#) and Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics, part of a Paris-based global conglomerate, demanding that they enter into binding consent orders to finance a state Superfund cleanup launched four weeks ago in Hoosick Falls, a small village on the [Vermont](#) border. The agency said other companies may be identified later and held liable.

"We will hold all companies responsible for groundwater contamination and make sure they pay all costs associated with the investigation and remediation of the source of the problem as well as assuring a usable drinking water source," commissioner Basil Seggos said.

The federal [Environmental Protection Agency](#) told Hoosick Falls residents to stop drinking municipal water in December, more than a year after contamination of the system serving 4,500 people was revealed by a private citizen and confirmed by local officials. The chemical, PFOA, or perfluorooctanoic acid, was used for decades in nonstick and stain-resistant coatings and hundreds of other products.

DEC traced the contamination to the site of the village's largest employer, a factory acquired by Saint-Gobain that previously was operated by Honeywell predecessor AlliedSignal Laminated Systems between 1986 and 1996 and other companies before that.

"As we've done from the first time we were notified about PFOA in Hoosick Falls in December 2014, we will continue to cooperate with all parties involved," Saint-Gobain spokeswoman Dina Pokedoff said.

Honeywell spokeswoman Victoria Ann Streitfeld said the company sent state health officials a letter last week offering assistance. "We met with agency officials on Monday again offering cooperation," Streitfeld said. "We are committed to continued cooperation."

PFOA, which manufacturers have voluntarily phased out, doesn't break down in the environment and has been linked to numerous diseases including cancer. The EPA has set a nonenforceable short-term exposure limit of 400 parts per trillion for PFOA in drinking water, but water suppliers aren't routinely required to test for it.

Groundwater under the Saint-Gobain plant near Hoosick Falls municipal wells tested at 18,000 ppt, the company reported last year. Municipal and private wells have tested at levels above 400 ppt. Saint-Gobain has been providing residents with free bottled water and has volunteered to pay for a new carbon filtration system currently being installed to remove PFOA from the municipal water supply.

The Hoosick Falls contamination is likely to come up during hearings in the state Assembly on water quality and aging infrastructure scheduled for April. Earlier this week Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, R-Long Island, said he'd be open to holding hearings, but only after the state finds a way to "fix the problem."

Fort Edward

After a PCB processing facility in Fort Edward just finished handling tons of PCB-tainted dirt for a new grocery store project, the state is seeking to change facility rules intended to keep dangerous emissions of cancer-causing dioxins within safe levels.

Environmental Soil Management LLC pushed about 2,100 tons of the polluted soil through its facility on Tow Path Lane just to the east of the village. The soil came from a former grocery store property on Route 4 that is being redeveloped into a new, 40,000-square-foot Market 32 for Golub Corp.

Now, the state Department of Environmental Conservation wants to change the company's air pollution permit to "establish the conditions under which ESMI (the company) must test PCB-contaminated material emissions for overall control and for the formation of dioxins," according to a DEC public notice issued last week.

Dioxins are known human carcinogens that can be created by incomplete combustion of chlorinated chemicals -- like PCBs. Dioxins are linked to cancers including soft-tissue sarcomas, lymphomas and stomach carcinomas, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Animal testing has also shown that the chemical causes skeletal deformities, kidney defects and weakened immune responses in offspring.

Environmental Soil Management, which has operated its Fort Edward facility since 1995, uses a heating process called "thermal desorption" to evaporate PCB and other chemical contamination from soil.

Asked about the changes to the company's PCB processing rules, DEC spokesman Sean Mahar said the steps would have had no effect on ESMI's ability to treat soil from the Route 4 property.

While ESMI's current permit allows the company to treat up to 933 tons of PCBs a year, equipment capacity limits treatment to about 20 tons of PCBs, he said. The new permit would limit treatment to no more than 15.4 tons of PCBs annually, Mahar said.

Proposed changes to the ESMI air pollution permit are "part of the overall scheme in limiting PCB emissions," according to a portion of the 38-page draft permit released online by DEC.

The permit also includes a limit on the PCB concentrations in batches of contaminated soil that can be run through the facility in the future, as well as "new limits on process feed rates," which is the rate at which tainted soils can be run through the processing units.

The new permit "also establishes allowable cumulative impacts taking into account emissions (of dioxins) from this facility combined with existing background concentrations," according to the DEC notice.

Thermal desorption works by first heating contaminated soils to between 200 and 600 degrees Fahrenheit, which evaporates chemicals called volatile organic compounds, like PCBs, into gas. That gas is then run through a second treatment called thermal oxidation, which runs at a higher temperature meant to destroy the dangerous components within the gas.

DEC is accepting public comment on the proposed new permit through March 4 to William P. Russo, NYSDEC Region 5, Warrensburg Sub-Office, 232 Golf Course Road, Warrensburg, NY 12885, or 518-623-1281, or DEP.R5@dec.ny.gov

The vacant, town-owned Broadway property is being developed by 354 Broadway LLC, which is owned by developers David Kaplan of Kaplan Realty and Bruce Ginsburg, owner of IKON Realty Group on Western Avenue in Albany.

The property used to be a Grand Union, which operated from 1980 to 2003. The ground was later found to be contaminated with PCBs.

Before being used as a Grand Union, the property was used as a gravel pit and scrap yard where GE-made electric capacitors, which contained PCBs, were disassembled and recycled. The property is across the street from the GE capacitor plant that is expected to close this year after decades as the town's major employer.

In April, the property was among about 800 PCB-tainted acres in Fort Edward added to the state Brownfield Opportunity Area program, which provides state assistance to clean and rebuild on cleaned-up properties. The program also gives developers an increased amount of state tax credits to subsidize cleanup and construction costs.

Assembly to examine Hoosick Falls water contamination at hearings

By Mark Robarge

Bennington Banner

Posted: 02/11/2016 08:50:49 PM EST

HOOSICK FALLS, N.Y. — As state and local officials question the response to the contamination of the village's water supply with a potentially cancer-causing chemical, the state Assembly has scheduled hearings on water quality throughout New York.

The Democratic-controlled Assembly will hold the hearings in April, in response to a bipartisan call for lawmakers to look into what critics have called a slow response to the discovery of perfluorooctanoic acid in water samples from wells the village uses to supply its water system. But while the office of Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, said the hearings will take a general look at water quality and aging infrastructure, Assemblyman Steve McLaughlin, R-Schaghticoke, whose district includes the village, welcomed the opportunity to look into the response first by village officials and then by the state Health Department.

"Protecting the safety of New Yorkers and monitoring governmental oversight is a unifying issue," McLaughlin said Thursday in a news release. "The people of Hoosick Falls deserve clean water, but they also deserve the truth. These hearings will shed light on who knew what, and when they knew it."

PFOA is a toxic chemical used for decades primarily to make Teflon coating for cookware. Samples from the village water system, which serves about 4,900 people, had PFOA levels that exceeded the EPA's provisional health advisory of 400 parts per trillion in each liter of water. Some studies have linked PFOA to certain types of cancer, and the EPA is considering regulating it under the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

The state Health Department initially declared village water safe to drink, but the EPA recommended in December that it not be used for cooking or drinking because of the presence of PFOA. The federal agency also recommended that private well owners have their water tested for contamination, as well.

Among the questions being asked by village residents are when local officials first became aware of the problem and when they first informed residents and why the state Health Department suddenly changed course and declared the Saint-Gobain Performance Plastics plant on McCaffrey Street as a state Superfund site only after the federal Environmental Protection Agency came in.

"In April, we're going to look at how to make sure something like this does not happen again," Assemblyman John McDonald, D-Cohoes, said Thursday. "I think that this will be beneficial in figuring out this problem."

McLaughlin has been especially critical of Gov. Andrew Cuomo and his administration for failing to even acknowledge the problem initially.

"We have the right to know why the state first determined that there were no expected health effects from normal use of the water supply, and then just weeks later announce the area would become a state Superfund site because the water is so badly contaminated," McLaughlin said. "Whether this is gross mismanagement, incompetence or a cover-up, the truth will be exposed and residents will have answers."

Documents recently made public indicate village officials were aware of possible contamination as early as the spring of 2014, but critics say the village was slow to acknowledge the problem and inform the public. Village officials deny any effort to cover up the problem and say they shared information with the public as soon as they received it. While the Assembly has scheduled hearings, McLaughlin said state Senate Majority Leader John Flanagan, R-East Northport, has chosen to not follow suit.

"I strongly urge and am hopeful that Sen. Flanagan will correct course, join Speaker Heastie and the Assembly and hold hearings on this critical issue," McLaughlin said. "It's the right thing to do and in the best interest of the health, safety and well-being of New Yorkers."

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